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Latin America Advisor

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FEATURED Q&A

Will Separatists Be Able to Make Their Case in Alberta?



Proponents of a ballot measure to separate Alberta from the rest of Canada face a May petition deadline to get their referendum question on the ballot. Calgary, the province's largest city, is pictured. // File Photo: Jeff Whyte via Adobe Stock.

Q Residents of Alberta could vote later this year, possibly in October, in a referendum asking whether to separate the province from Canada. Organizers need the signatures of 10 percent of the province's registered voters, or 177,000 people, by a May 2 deadline in order for the vote to be scheduled. How likely is the referendum to get on the ballot, and, if it does, what is the most likely outcome? What is motivating the secession movement in Alberta? What would Alberta's separation mean for it and for Canada?

A Yale D. Belanger, chair of the political science department at the University of Lethbridge: "Alberta's flirtation with independence suggests that a referendum question asking voters to decide on the province's future role in Canadian federalism could be part of the broader campaign leading up to the fall 2026 vote. Under Alberta's Citizen Initiative Act, organizers would need to collect approximately 177,000 signatures by May 2, which is achievable in our digitally connected era. The referendum would give minor secessionist parties, UCP members and their supporters pushing for separation, as well as outspoken activists, an opportunity to voice frustration over perceived injustices in federal energy and climate policies and equalization payments. However, the chances of independence drop sharply when you consider a recent Angus Reid poll indicating that if a vote were held today, 65 percent of Albertans would vote to stay or lean toward remaining in Canada. A 'no' vote, therefore, seems likely, suggesting that Alberta's separatist movement is more of a social media phenomenon than one with broad support. Even if the 'yes' side narrowly wins, separation isn't auto-

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U.S., Venezuela to Re-establish Diplomatic Ties

The United States and Venezuela have agreed to re-establish diplomatic relations, the U.S. State Department announced Thursday.

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U.S., Mexico to Launch Trade Talks on March 16

The U.S. and Mexican governments plan to launch trade talks on March 16 ahead of a scheduled review of the United States-Mexico-Canada trade agreement.

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POLITICAL

Hegseth Urges More Aggressive Approach to Drug Cartels

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on Thursday urged Latin American and Caribbean countries to take a more aggressive approach to fighting drug cartels. U.S. President Donald Trump is to meet with several heads of state from the region on Saturday.

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Hegseth // File Photo: U.S. Defense Department.

POLITICAL NEWS

U.S., Venezuela to Re-establish Diplomatic Relations

The United States and Venezuela have agreed to re-establish diplomatic relations, the U.S. State Department announced Thursday, a move that came two months after the U.S. capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and publicly warming relations between Washington and Caracas. “This step will facilitate our joint efforts to promote stability, support economic recovery, and advance political reconciliation in Venezuela,” the State Department said in a statement. “Our engagement is focused on helping the Venezuelan people move forward through a phased process that creates the conditions for a peaceful transition to a democratically elected government,” it added. The announcement came at the end of a two-day visit to Caracas by U.S. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum, who discussed potential mining-sector cooperation and investment with acting Venezuelan President Delcy Rodríguez, who served as Maduro’s vice president. Last month, U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright traveled to Venezuela to meet with Rodríguez and discuss the country’s oil sector. U.S. President Donald Trump has recently praised Rodríguez. “Delcy Rodríguez, who is the President of Venezuela, is doing a great job, and working with U.S. Representatives very well,” Trump said Wednesday in a post on his Truth Social platform. “The Oil is beginning to flow, and the professionalism and dedication between both Countries is a very nice thing to see!” he added. In a statement, Rodríguez’s government said re-establishing diplomatic relations with the United States “will contribute to strengthening understanding and opening opportunities for a positive and mutually beneficial relationship,” the Associated Press reported. Since Maduro’s ouster—and under U.S. pressure—Venezuela has moved to open its oil industry to private investment, and Rodríguez’s government has approved an amnesty law to free political prisoners. The amnesty law, however, has

drawn controversy. The law “narrowly defines eligibility, does not automatically restore political rights and lacks safeguards against renewed misuse of the justice system,” Mark Feierstein, a senior advisor at DGA-Albright Stonebridge Group, told the Advisor in a [Q&A](#) published Feb. 25.

Hegseth Urges More Aggressive Approach to Drug Cartels

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on Thursday urged Latin American countries to fight drug cartels more aggressively, saying that the United States would be forced to act if they do not, the Associated Press reported. “America is prepared to take on these threats and go on the offense alone if necessary,” Hegseth said in a speech at the U.S. Southern Command in Miami to defense officials from countries allied with the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump. “Business as usual will not stand,” he added. The Pentagon billed the event as the first “Americas Counter Cartel Conference.” Representatives of 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries attended, but representatives of some countries with significant levels of drug trafficking and production, notably Colombia, Mexico and Brazil, were not present, The Guardian reported. The gathering came just ahead of Trump’s planned meeting on Saturday in Florida with several Latin American and Caribbean heads of state. Hegseth’s comments at Thursday’s conference were echoed by Stephen Miller, the deputy White House chief of staff and homeland security advisor, who said military force is necessary to defeat drug cartels. “What we have learned after decades of effort is that there is not a criminal justice solution to the cartel problem,” Miller said, The Guardian reported. “The reason why this is a conference with military leadership and not a conference of lawyers is because these organizations can only be defeated with military power,” he added. Citing Trump administration actions to designate cartels based in Mexico, Venezuela and Colombia as foreign terrorist organizations, Miller said such groups are “the ISIS and

NEWS BRIEFS

Ecuadorean Forces Sink ‘Narco Sub’ in Operation Along Northern Border

Ecuador’s defense ministry announced Thursday that troops discovered and sank a 35-meter-long submarine apparently to be used for drug trafficking near the country’s northern border with Colombia. The submersible, which was found in a channel in a nature reserve, was “ready to begin a prolonged voyage linked to illicit activities,” the ministry said in a post on X.

Zelestra Gets Financing for Solar Farm in Peru

Spanish renewable energy developer Zelestra has secured \$176 million in financing to finish building a 242-megawatt-capacity solar farm in southern Peru, the firm said on Thursday. Natixis and BBVA agreed to provide the financing for the Babilonia solar project, which will form part of Zelestra’s mammoth 700-megawatt La Joya complex located to the south of Arequipa. Private Peruvian utility firm Celespa has already signed a long-term power-purchase agreement tied to the Babilonia solar project, Zelestra said.

Ecopetrol to Boost New Spending Amid Oil Market Disruption: CEO

Colombian state-run oil firm Ecopetrol could invest as much as \$1.3 billion more than previously planned this year due to higher oil prices resulting from the conflict in the Persian Gulf, Ecopetrol CEO Ricardo Roa said Thursday on an earnings call, Reuters reported. Ecopetrol’s spending on new assets and ongoing operations this year could jump from \$5.8 billion to \$7.1 billion, Roa said. Heavy grades of crude oil from the Americas have traded at substantial premiums this week amid an absence of supply from major producers like Iraq and Kuwait, Reuters reported on Thursday.

the Al-Qaida of the Western Hemisphere and should be treated just as brutally and just as ruthlessly as we treat those organizations,” The Guardian reported.

ECONOMIC NEWS

U.S., Mexico to Launch Trade Talks on March 16

The U.S. and Mexican governments said Thursday that trade talks will begin on March 16 ahead of a planned review of the trilateral USMCA trade accord, which also involves Canada, the Associated Press reported. In a video posted on social media site X, Mexican Economy Secretary Marcelo Ebrard said bilateral talks with U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer will include discussion of issues including rules of origin, supply chain security and economic integration in order to increase competitiveness with other parts of the world.

BUSINESS NEWS

Shell Signs Deal to Develop Oil, Gas Projects in Venezuela

British-Dutch oil major Shell signed agreements with Venezuela’s government on Thursday that clear the way for the firm to develop multiple oil and gas projects in the South American country, Shell said in a statement, Reuters reported. One of the deals, the specific details of which were not publicly disclosed, will allow Shell to resume work as planned on the Dragon project, an offshore natural gas field located in waters split between Venezuela and Trinidad and Tobago. The Caribbean nation’s energy minister, Roodal Moonilal, told reporters on Thursday that commercial gas production from the Dragon project is now expected by the

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matic under the federal Clarity Act—Canada’s Parliament would need to determine whether the referendum question and result are clear enough before initiating negotiations. As observers have noted, the complex and unprecedented process of gaining independence would require Albertans to first settle lingering questions about debt sharing, inter-provincial trade deals, currency, borders and treaty obligations with First Nations, among others. For some, the anger may be real, and their digital footprint large. Nevertheless, independence remains unlikely.”

A Carlo Dade, director of international policy at the University of Calgary School of Public Policy and former director of the Trade & Investment Centre at the Canada West

Foundation: “Alberta leaving Canada is a story because it’s a story. Without the national and unfortunately increasing international media attention, the issue would simmer out of sight as it does in most provinces across Canada. Historic polling on separatism shows Saskatchewan with the highest numbers wanting to leave, while British Columbia has had as high as a quarter wanting to leave. Manitobans seem happiest out west with ‘only’ close to 10 percent wanting out of Canada. And of course, there’s Quebec. Different question framing and timing moves the numbers and makes comparisons difficult, but the point is—Alberta is not unique. Unfortunately, ‘75 percent of Albertans want

to remain in Canada’ doesn’t make a good headline. But that is the real story. A recent ‘Alberta Forever Canada’ initiative to have a ballot question to block secession garnered more than 400,000 votes, or 13 percent of the voting population and 100,000 signa-

“**Opposition to leaving Canada is stronger and larger, but it is also more complacent and certainly less vocal than the ‘in your face’ leave side.**”

— Carlo Dade

tures more than needed to get on the ballot. Opposition to leaving Canada is stronger and larger, but it is also more complacent and certainly less vocal than the ‘in your face’ leave side. The latter is good TV, the former is not. The leave side is concentrated within one of the two major provincial parties, the conservatives, who lost seats in the last election, especially in urban ridings. These factors amplify leave voices within the party, making life difficult for the provincial premier, who is party leader. Relatively new Prime Minister Mark Carney has repaired some of the extensive damage done to the already not well-regarded Liberal brand in western Canada. Simply not being Justin Trudeau helped, but his announcement of

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second half of 2027 after Shell’s agreement with Venezuela’s government, Reuters reported. In October, Venezuela’s government suspended all energy agreements with Trinidad and Tobago, effectively shutting down construction and exploration work on the Dragon project, Al Jazeera English reported. But since the U.S. military’s Jan. 3 ouster of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, the government of acting President Delcy Rodríguez has taken steps to soften the country’s stance toward foreign multinational firms’ participation in major oil and

gas projects. The new agreements with Shell show “that Venezuela continues to be a safe and reliable destination for foreign investment,” Venezuela’s military-run television station said Thursday in a post on Telegram, Reuters reported. The Dragon project, as well as Shell’s Aphrodite project off Trinidad and Tobago’s eastern coast, is expected to feed the country’s flagship Atlantic LNG liquefaction plant, which has slashed its production capacity in recent years amid dwindling domestic hydrocarbons output.

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support for a new pipeline to the west coast received a standing ovation from the Calgary business community. If his government can actually deliver on the promise, then shovels going into the ground to build a pipeline will also bury the separatist movement.”

A Charles Breton, executive director of the Centre of Excellence on the Canadian Federation at the Institute for Research on Public Policy: “All signs point to the question of Alberta’s separation getting on the ballot and joining nine other questions that the premier herself has announced will be put to Albertans on Oct. 19. Five of those questions relate to immigration policy, while the others touch on a series of constitutional questions. Getting on the ballot is one thing, but polling data suggests that a minority of Albertans would vote yes to separation. Support for separation ranges from 20 percent to 30 percent depending on the poll. The notion of ‘western alienation’ has always been present in Alberta (and the smaller neighboring province of Saskatchewan) and many Albertans feel like their province does not get the respect it deserves in the country given its economic contribution stemming from its oil and gas industry. The secession movement takes its roots in this sentiment—of being mistreated—but adds notion of

libertarianism and even a desire to join the United States as an alternative. Individuals involved in the ‘yes’ campaign have traveled to the United States to discuss potential support. One thing is sure, a ‘yes’ majority wouldn’t suddenly make Alberta a sovereign country. Because of a past Supreme Court

“Getting on the ballot is one thing, but polling data suggests that a minority of Albertans would vote yes to separation.”

— Charles Breton

opinion on the matter (in relation to the Quebec referendum of 1995), the steps following a clear yes vote are both clearly established but also fraught with uncertainty. It would trigger complicated negotiations with the federal government. Those would touch on a series of issues to be resolved—importantly, the fact some Indigenous governments have already indicated that they’d want to stay in Canada.”

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta.

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